



ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY



February 25, 2019

The Honorable Carlo Leone, Chair  
The Honorable Roland J. Lemar, Chair  
Transportation Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
Legislative Office Building, Room 2300  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Chairman Leone and Chairman Lemar:

As leading safety organizations working together to pass highway and auto safety laws that prevent unnecessary crashes, deaths and injuries, and contain costs, we urge you to support House Bill (HB) 7140. This legislation will upgrade traffic safety in Connecticut by requiring all vehicle occupants to buckle up on every trip and all riders to wear a helmet on every ride. Considering the prevalence of unrestrained occupant fatal crashes and unhelmeted fatal motorcycle crashes, this legislation is critical, responsive and timely.

In 2017, 278 people were killed in traffic crashes in Connecticut, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). More than 38 percent of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2017 were unrestrained, when restraint use was known. Crashes involving a motorcycle killed 57 riders, 60 percent of whom were not wearing helmets, when helmet use was known. Over the ten-year period of 2008 to 2017, motor vehicle crashes claimed the lives of 2,624 people on Connecticut roads (NHTSA). By any measure, this is a serious public health problem in urgent need of a remedy which HB 7140 provides.

It is essential that a seat belt law covers both front and rear seat passengers to improve seat belt use and the safety of all occupants. When a passenger is ejected from the vehicle, their chances of survival are greatly diminished. In fatal crashes, 83 percent of passenger vehicle occupants who were totally ejected from the vehicle were killed (NHTSA). Only one percent of the occupants reported to have been using restraints were totally ejected, compared with 30 percent of unrestrained occupants. Further, the proportion of unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants killed that were seated in the front seat was 46 percent, compared to 56 percent of unrestrained passenger vehicle occupants killed that were seated in the rear seat (NHTSA).

Unbelted rear seat passengers pose a serious threat to the driver and other vehicle occupants. Known as “back seat bullets,” unbelted rear seat passengers can be thrust at high rates of speed into other occupants, causing fatalities and serious injuries, as well as loss of control of the vehicle. The risk of death for a belted driver seated directly in front of an unrestrained passenger in a serious head-on crash more than doubles than if seated in front of a restrained passenger.<sup>i</sup> Seat belt use in the rear seat is especially crucial as the safety infrastructure built into the vehicle is not as developed in the rear seat as it is in the front seat.<sup>ii</sup>

Furthermore, the majority of passengers in the rear seats of vehicles are teens and children, and studies have shown that seat belt usage by teens and young adults (age 16 – 24) is among one of the lowest segments of society. Seat belt use by adults also impacts child passenger safety. Child restraint use drops by 40 percent when parents don’t use their seat belts (NHTSA).

Similarly, it is critical that motorcycle helmet laws cover all-riders. Per mile travelled, motorcyclist fatalities occurred almost 28 times more frequently than passenger car occupant fatalities in 2016. Minor only helmet laws such as Connecticut’s current helmet law, which only requires use for age 17 and younger, are ineffective and difficult to enforce. They are also detrimental to young riders, the population they intend to protect. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, in states with only youth-specific helmet laws, helmet use has decreased and youth mortality has increased. Serious traumatic brain injury among young riders was 38 percent higher in states with age-specific laws compared to states with all-rider helmet laws.

It would be unimaginable today for a professional baseball player to bat without a batting helmet or a football player not to wear a helmet while on the gridiron. For that matter, it would be unthinkable for any Connecticut high school or college athlete to play football or ice hockey without head protection. It should be equally unthinkable for a motorcyclist to be driving without a helmet at 60 miles per hour next to 80,000 pound trucks and 4,000 pound motor vehicles. Enacting an all-rider motorcycle helmet law will improve safety for riders of all age groups.

Seat belts and motorcycle helmet requirements not only save lives and prevent lifelong debilitating injuries, they also save taxpayer dollars. Motor vehicle crashes cost Connecticut nearly \$4.9 billion annually (NHTSA). Unbelted crash victims have medical bills that are 55 percent higher than belted victims, and society bears a majority of the cost through increased insurance premiums, taxes, and health care costs (NHTSA). Unbelted occupants are also costly to businesses. Nationally, in 2013, injuries to people who were not wearing their safety belts cost employers \$4.9 billion (NETS, Cost of Crashes Report 2015).

Helmets reduce the chance of a fatal injury by 37 percent for motorcycle operators and 41 percent for passengers (NHTSA). In 2016, helmet use saved over \$127 million in comprehensive costs in Connecticut (NHTSA). If all riders had worn helmets, the state could have saved an additional \$206 million (NHTSA).

When strong and clear traffic safety laws are passed, the public heeds them accordingly. A poll released by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) found that nearly 40 percent of people surveyed said they sometimes don't buckle up in the rear seat because there is no law requiring it. If such a law existed, 60 percent of poll respondents said it would convince them to do so.<sup>iii</sup> Similarly, support for laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear helmets is consistently high; 75 percent of Connecticut residents polled favor these laws.<sup>iv</sup>

Seat belts saved the lives of 112 people on Connecticut roads in 2017, yet 17 more lives could have been saved if everyone had buckled up (NHTSA). If all riders had worn helmets when riding on Connecticut roads in 2017, 13 more lives could have been saved (NHTSA). We urge the Committee to take action to save lives and advance HB 7140.

Sincerely,

Emergency Nurses Association  
Connecticut State Council

Dan Petterson  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Skilled Motorcyclist Association  
Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders

Roberta Friedman  
Chair, Advocacy Committee  
Connecticut Public Health Association

Catherine Chase  
President  
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Erin Collins  
Asst. Vice President - State Affairs  
National Association of  
Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC)

Janette Fennell  
Founder and President  
KidsAndCars.org

cc: The Honorable Alexandra Bergstein, Vice Chair  
The Honorable Travis Simms, Vice Chair  
The Honorable Henri Martin, Ranking Member  
The Honorable Laura M. Devlin, Ranking Member  
Transportation Committee Members

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<sup>i</sup> Mayrose, James, *Influence of the Unbelted Rear-seat Passenger on Driver Mortality: "The Backseat Bullet"*, Academic Emergency Medicine, Volume 12, Issue 2. Article first published online: 28 June 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Sahraei at al. *Reduced Protection for Belted Occupants in Rear Seats Relative to Front Seats of New Model Year Vehicles*, Proc AAAM, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> IIHS, *Status Report*, "UNBELTED Adults admit they often skip belts in rear seat", Vol. 52, No. 5, August 3, 2017.

<sup>iv</sup> Hartford Current, Connecticut Needs Motorcycle Helmet Law For All, July 2018: <https://www.courant.com/opinion/editorials/hc-ed-riding-without-helmet-is-foolish-20180621-story.html>